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Ballou's Monthly Magazine (1866-1893); Dec 1870; 32, 6; American Periodicals
pg. 538

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A CHRISTMAS STORY.

BY GODFREY TURNER.

IN a town which we will call Middletown, because it was of the middle size, dwelt a worthy shopkeeper bearing the odd name of Jeremiah Wag. By dealing in all sorts of commodities, and steady attention to his business, he had managed to keep up his respectability, and doubtless would have considerably increased his store, but for the gradual increase of his family. For several years after his marriage a new little Wag was ushered annually into the world; and though there had latterly been somewhat less of regularity, as many as ten small heads might be counted every evening in his back parlor. Jerry, the eldest boy, was, however, almost fourteen years of age, and therefore began to "make himself useful," by carrying out small parcels and assisting behind the counter. All the rest were, to use their parent's phrase, "dead stock," and "were eating their heads off;" for, sooth to say, they were a jolly little set, and blessed with most excellent appetites. Such was the state of family matters at the time when our narrative commences.

Now, on the opposite side of the street, exactly facing the modest board on which Jeremiah's name was painted, with the usual announcement of certain commodities in which he dealt, was another board of a very different description. On it were emblazoned the arms of her majesty, with the supporters, a lion and a unicorn, as the country folks said, "a fighting for the crown."

The establishment indicated by this display was upheld by a very different class of

customers to that which patronized the shop. Two or three times in each day some private carriage or postchaise would stop to change horses at the King's Arms, and occasionally "a family" took up their quarters there for the night; but the latter was a piece of good luck not often to be expected, as there were no lions to be seen in Middletown save the red rampant guardian on the signboard.

It was haymaking time, and business was very "slack" with the worthy Jeremiah; but he said that he didn't care much about it, as the country folks were earning money, part of which he trusted would find its way into his till in due course. So, after rummaging about among his stock to see if he was "out of anything," he took his stand at the door, just to breathe a mouthful of fresh air. Titus Twist, the landlord, made his appearance at the same moment in his own gateway, apparently with the same salubrious intent, and immediately beckoned to his neighbor just to step across.

"Well, how are you, Master Wag?" said he, when they met. "Did you observe that green chariot that stands down in the yard there, and came in more than an hour ago?" Jeremiah answered in the negative. "Well, continued mine host, "it belongs to one of the oddest, rummest little old gentlemen I ever clapped my eyes on. He's been asking me all sorts of questions, and seems mighty tickled with your name above all things. I think he's cracked. Howsoever, he's ordered dinner; but hush! here he comes."

The little gentleman in question seemed between sixty and seventy; but, excepting a certain sallowness of complexion, carried his years well, his motions being lively, and wearing a good-humored smile, as though habitual, on his countenance. His dress was plain but good, and altogether becoming his apparent rank.

"I shall be back in a quarter of an hour," said he, to the landlord; "I'm only going over the way to the shop to buy something." And away he went, and, of course, was followed by Jeremiah, who, immediately on entering his own house, skipped nimbly behind the counter to wait upon his new customer.

After trying on some gloves, and purchasing two pairs, the little strange gentleman looked round the shop, as though examining its contents to find something he wanted.

"Anything else I can do for you, sir?" asked Jeremiah.

"You sell almost everything, I see, Mr. Wag," observed the old gentleman. "Mr. Wag? Your name is Wag, I suppose?"

"Yes sir," replied the shopkeeper, dryly.

"Wag, Wag, Wag!" repeated the stranger, briskly. "Funny name! eh?"

"It was my father's before me," observed Jeremiah, scarcely knowing what to think of the matter.

"Very good name!" continued the little gentleman; "like it very much. Got any children? Any little Wags, eh? Like to see 'em. Fond of children—little Wags in particular—he, he, he!"

"Much obliged to ye for inquiring, sir," replied the senior Wag; "I've got just half a score, sorted sizes. That's the eldest!" And he pointed to young Jerry, whose lanky limbs were at the moment displayed, spread-eagle fashion, against the shelves, from the topmost of which he was reaching down some commodity for a customer.

"That's right. Bring 'em up to industry," said the little gentleman. "Well, I can't stay now, because my dinner's ready; but I see you sell Irish linen, and I want a piece for shirts; so, perhaps, you'll be so good as to look me out a good one and bring it over to me."

"You may rely," commenced Mr. Wag, but his new customer cut him short by adding:

"I know that well enough," and briskly made his exit.

The industrious shopkeeper forthwith selected certain of his primest articles, folded

them in a wrapper, and, at the appointed time, carried the whole across to King's Arms.

He was immediately ushered into the presence of the eccentric elderly gentleman, who was seated alone behind a bottle of white and a bottle of red. "Suppose you've dined, Master Wag," said he; "so, come! No ceremony, sit down and take a glass of wine."

"I'm very much obliged to you, I'm sure, sir," replied Jeremiah, "but I have just brought half a dozen pieces of Irish for you to look at and choose."

"Phoo, phoo!" quoth the small stranger, "I don't want to see them. I know nothing about 'em. Leave all to you. Only meant to have had a piece; but, as you've brought half a dozen, I may as well take 'em. 'Store is no sore,' they say. There's a fifty pound note! Reckon 'em up and see if there's any change."

Jeremiah stared at this unusual wholesale mode of dealing, stammered his thanks, and observed that the goods would not amount to half the money.

"So much the worse," said the little gentleman. "Must see if I can't buy something else in your line presently; but sit down now; that's a good fellow! I want to have some talk with you."

The bashful shopkeeper hereupon perched himself on the extreme front edge of a chair, at a respectful distance from the table; but was told to draw up closer by his hospitable entertainer. Then they took three or four glasses of wine together, and gradually Jeremiah found himself more at home, and scrupled not to reply to the odd stranger's questions respecting his family and occupations. And so they went on chatting till they appeared as two very old and intimate friends; for Mr. Wag was of an open unsuspecting disposition, and talked as though he had no objection that all the world should know all about his affairs.

"Well, but, my dear Wag," said the stranger, "can't you tell what part of the country your father came from?"

"No sir, I can't," replied Jeremiah; "he died when I was about eight years old, and the London merchant to whom he was clerk put me to school, and after that apprenticed me to old Hicks, who lived over the way where I do now. Well, there I served my time, and then married his daughter, and so came in for the business when he died; but I've in-

creased it a pretty deal; and if I'd more capital could make a snug thing of it by going into the wholesale, and serving village shops with grocery, and so on."

"Why don't you try it?" asked the little gentleman.

"It wont do unless one has got the ready to go to market with," replied Jeremiah, knowingly; "and then one must be able to give credit, and ought to keep one's own wagon to carry out goods. No, no, it wont do. Many a man has made bad worse by getting out of his depth; and, as it is, thank God, I can live. The only thing that puzzles me now and then is what I shall do with all the children."

"Harkye, my worthy Wag," said the odd stranger, "I have not got any children; so, if you'll let me pick among the lot I don't care if I take two or three off your hands."

"Sir!" exclaimed the astonished shopkeeper.

"I mean what I say," replied the old gentleman, demurely. "Take me with you. Introduce me to your wife and family, and let us all have a friendly cup of tea together in your back parlor. Don't stare, my good Wag, but fill your glass. I don't want to buy your little Wags, but I happen to have more of the ready, as you call it, than I want; so I'll put them to school or what you like. What say you?"

Jeremiah rubbed his eyes as though doubtful if he were awake, and then uttered his thanks for such extraordinary kindness in the best way he was able, and about an hour after the whimsical little old rich gentleman was sitting by the side of Mrs. Wag, with a little curly-headed Wag on each knee, while the rest were playing round or gazing open-mouthed at the stranger with childish wonder.

By degrees all stiffness wore off, and, before the evening concluded, nothing could exceed the merriment of the whole party. The eccentric elderly gentleman had learned to call all the Wags by their names, and he played, and frolicked, and rolled upon the floor with the little people, in a style that made the parents suspect, with the landlord, that he must be "cracked."

However, at parting, he became more serious, and invited Jeremiah to come and breakfast with him in the morning, and to bring with him a copy of the names and birthdays of his children, as entered in the family Bible.

Mr. and Mrs. Wag, of course, lay awake for

an hour that night, talking over the strange incidents of the day, and perhaps building a few castles in the air, after the style of affectionate parents for their children.

On the following morning Jeremiah dressed himself in his Sunday suit, and repaired to fulfil his engagement. His new old friend received him in the most cordial manner, and they breakfasted together, chatting over family concerns as on the preceding day. When their repast was ended, the little gentleman read over the list of the young Wags, and smilingly observed:

"A jolly set of them! We must contrive to make them all good and happy Wags, if we can, eh? Eldest, Jerry, almost fourteen—useful to you in business. That's right. Leave him there, eh? Next, Thomas, almost thirteen—fond of reading—told me so. A good school first, eh? Then three girls running, Mary, Anne and Fanny. Pack them off to a good school too. Never mind. Then comes William, eight, and Stephen, seven. Think I know where to place them. Just the right age. Perhaps can't do it at once, though. That's all I can take *at present*. The other three, Sarah, Henry and Philip, too young. Well, my worthy Wag, you will hear what I mean to do with them before long, and a friend of mine will call upon you some day to consult about the best way of increasing your business. Settle all in time. No more to say now, but good-by—eh? Paid the landlord's bill before breakfast, 'cause don't like to be kept waiting. Didn't mean to have stopped longer than to change horses when I came yesterday. Glad I have, though. Hope you won't be sorry. Halloo! waiter! is my carriage ready?"

"At the door, sir," shouted the landlord, in reply.

"That's right!" exclaimed the extraordinary elderly gentleman. "Good-by, my worthy Wag! Remember me to Mrs. Wag, and give my love to all the little Wags. Ten besides yourselves! A dozen Wags in one family! Never expected to see such a sight as that! He, he, he! See it again, though, hope. Wag together, all of you, like a bundle of sticks, hope!" And, laughing and uttering similar incoherent sentences alternately, he walked briskly along the passage to his carriage, into which he forthwith jumped, and, having repeated his valediction to the astounded shopkeeper, ordered the postilion to drive on.

Thus Jeremiah was prevented from ex-

pressing his grateful feelings for such wonderful promises, and so stood gaping in silence till the carriage was out of sight.

"Why, you seem regularly 'mazed, neighbor!" exclaimed the landlord.

"Enough to make me," replied Mr. Wag. "If one half what I've heard this morning should come true, I shall be a lucky fellow, that's all!"

"The old fellow's cracked," observed Titus Twist. "He's a gentleman, however, every inch of him, that I will say for him. Didn't make a word about nothing. All right. Used to good living, no doubt. More's the pity, as he's cracked. He certainly ought not to be allowed to travel without a servant, as he does."

"Well," observed Jeremiah, "I don't know what to say or what to think about it; but, if he is cracked—hump! I don't know. It may be so. However, there's no harm done yet!"

"So he's been cramming you, eh!" said mine host. "Made you a present of the moon, perhaps? They do fancy strange things, and think themselves kings, and very rich in particular."

The truth of this latter assertion made an impression upon our worthy shopkeeper, who communicated it to his wife; but she had taken a great fancy to the odd old gentleman, and was not to be shaken in her conviction that he would really be "as good as his word."

"Well," observed her husband, "time will show; and, at all events, it was no bad thing to sell six pieces of fine linen at once. We don't have such customers every day. However, the best thing we can do is to keep our own secret; for, if the neighbors were to hear of it we should never hear the last of it."

Mrs. Wag agreed in the propriety of her spouse's suggestion, but, nevertheless, was unable to refrain from dropping hints to sundry gossips concerning her anticipations of coming good fortune; and the vagueness and mysterious importance of her manner created a sensation and caused many strange surmises. Some decided that the Wags had been so imprudent as to purchase a whole lottery ticket, and blamed them accordingly, while others shook their heads, and hinted that, with so large a family, it would be a very fortunate circumstance if Jeremiah could manage so as not to go back in the world; and, for their parts, they never liked to hear folks talk mysteriously about good

luck; so, for some time, the stranger's visit appeared to have produced results the reverse of beneficial; but, at the end of a month, an elderly gentleman, dressed in black, entered the shop, and requested a private interview with Mr. Wag; and as the back parlor was full of little Wags, then undergoing the ceremonies of ablution, combing, etc., he proposed that they should adjourn to the King's Arms.

When they were seated there, the stranger very deliberately proceeded to arrange a variety of papers upon the table in a business-like manner; and when his task was completed, apparently to his satisfaction, he smiled, rubbed his hands, and thus addressed the wondering shopkeeper:

"My name is Stephen Goodfellow. I am an attorney, living in London; and there (handing a card) is my address. You will probably guess who my client is, but my instructions are to conceal his name. Well, he has consulted me as to the best mode of carrying your intention of increasing your business into effect, and I have, consequently, had interviews with certain commercial gentlemen, and, ahem! the result is, that as the thing must be done gradually, I have to present you, in the first place, with this order for a thousand pounds. You will then be so good as to sign this document, by reading which you will perceive that you *cannot* be called upon for repayment before the expiration of three years. Ahem! don't interrupt me. That will do to begin with; but, after a little while, as you must give credit, and some of your commodities, particularly grocery, amount to considerable sums, you may want more, so—ahem!—yes, this is the paper. You are to put your usual signature here; and, mark me, in precisely six months from this day, an account will be opened in your name with the London bankers, whose check-book I now present you with. They will have assets in their hands, and instructions to honor your drafts for any sum or sums not exceeding four thousand pounds. You understand?"

"I hear what you say, sir," stammered Jeremiah, "but, really, I'm so astonished that—"

"Well, well," observed Mr. Goodfellow, smiling, "it certainly is not an everyday transaction, but my respected client is a little eccentric, and so we must allow him to do things in his own way. He has taken a fancy to you, that's clear, and when he takes anything in hand he doesn't mind trifles."

"But so much!" exclaimed Mr. Wag. "One thousand—four thousand—five thousand pounds! It is like a dream! Surely, sir," and he hesitated; "surely the gentleman can't be in—aheu!—in his—right senses?"

"Sound as a bell," replied the lawyer. "I hope you may have as clear a head to carry on your new business. At present you are a little bewildered, that's plain enough, but no great marvel. However, my time is precious, so just let me have your signature, and I'm off."

He then placed the papers before Jeremiah, who, after a little more demur, and a great deal of trepidation, wrote his name twice, and received the money order and the banker's check-book. Mr. Goodfellow then ordered a chaise, and chatted familiarly till it was ready, when he shook Mr. Wag by the hand, wished him good luck, and departed.

"I told you so!" exclaimed Mrs. Wag, when her spouse related the morning's adventure. "He seemed so fond of the children. I knew how it would be. But you should have asked his name. I wonder who he can be! Some great lord, no doubt. Well, bless him, I say! God bless him, whoever he is. O Jerry! my dear Jerry Wag! I feel as if I was a going to cry. How foolish! Well, I can't help it, and that's the truth." And the good housewife wiped her eyes, and then threw her arms round the neck of her dearly beloved Wag, who, albeit that he was unused to the melting mood, found his eyes suddenly grow dim, and so they performed a weeping duet together.

Much marvelling, of course, there was in the town and neighborhood at the steady increase in Mr. Wag's "concern," in spite of his very plain statement that a kind friend had advanced him a considerable sum.

"Who could that friend be?" was the puzzling question, which no one could answer; but his unremitting attention to business, the punctuality of his payments, and other evidences of his prosperity, sufficed to insure him general respect, though certain envious busybodies would venture now and then to hint significantly, that "all is not gold that glistens."

So matters went on pleasantly with the Wags, till winter, when Tom and his three sisters came home for the holidays, and the latter assisted their mother in preparing for the festivities of the season:

It was Christmas eve, and the whole of the

family were congregated in the little back parlor, when young Jerry started up at the well-known sound of a customer at the shop door, at which he arrived with a hop, step and jump; and, jerking it open, beheld a little old gentleman wrapped in a large cloak.

"Please to walk in, sir," said Jerry Wag.

"Hush!" whispered the stranger, placing his forefinger on his mouth; "I want to surprise them. You're all together to-night, I suppose?"

"Yes sir," replied Jerry, smiling, for he thought he knew to whom he was speaking.

"That's right," said the odd elderly gentleman, advancing cautiously towards the darkest part of the shop and throwing off his cloak. "Now for a Christmas frolic! Come here, you rogue! Why you've grown taller than me. That's right! a thriving Wag! Now, mind, you go back as if nothing had happened, and give me hold of your coat-tail, so that I can't be seen. That'll do. No laughing, you young monkey. There, step along."

Jerry did as he was bid, save that, though he bit his lips unmercifully, his risible muscles would not remain inactive; and thus the oddly joined pair made their way into the family apartment just as the eldest daughter had exclaimed, "Now, mamma, it's your turn to wish!"

They were sitting in a semicircle before the fire, and the stranger and his shield, of course, stood behind them.

"Heigho!" said Mrs. Wag; "there's only one thing I wish for to-night, and that is the addition of one more to our party."

"Name! name! You must name your wish!" cried three or four juvenile voices, in full glee.

"I wish I could tell you his name," said Mrs. Wag, "but your father knows who I mean. Don't you, my dear?"

"I can't mistake you, my love," replied Jeremiah, affectionately, "and I wish he could see how happy we are. It would do his heart good, I really think."

"Who can he be?" exclaimed the eldest daughter.

"Perhaps it's somebody like me!" cried the little odd gentleman, stepping briskly forward.

"It is! it is!" shrieked mamma, and up jumped the whole party, and down went Mrs. Wag upon her knees, while, utterly unconscious of what she did, her arms were clasped round the neck of her benefactor,

whose bodily frame, being unable to sustain her matronly weight, gave way, and so they rolled together on the floor.

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed the eccentric elderly gentleman, as soon as he recovered breath, but without attempting to rise. "This is a Christmas gambol, eh! Master Wag?—eh! my merry little Wags? Needn't ask you all how you are."

"My dear sir!" exclaimed Jeremiah, "allow me to assist you. I hope you are not hurt."

"Hurt!" cried the little gentleman, jumping up, and offering his hand to Mrs. Wag. "Hurt! Why, I feel myself twenty years younger than I did five minutes ago. Never mind, ma'am. Like Christmas gambols. Always did. Happen to have such a thing as a bunch of mistletoe, eh?"

"I am sure, sir," whimpered Mrs. Wag, "I shall never forgive myself. To think of taking such a liberty; I—I—can't conceive how I could—"

"As often as ever you please, my good lady," said the eccentric, handing her to a chair; "but sit down and compose yourself, while I shake hands all round." And, turning towards Jeremiah, he commenced the ceremony, which he went through with from the eldest to the youngest, calling them all by their names, as correctly as though he were a constant visitor.

A right merry Christmas eve was that. The young Wags were, ever and anon, obliged to hold their sides, as they laughed and screamed with delight at the funny stories told by the funny little old gentleman, who romped and played with them with as much glee as though he had been the youngest of the party. So the hours passed quickly away till the unwelcome sound of "bed-time" was whispered among the little circle; and then one after another departed, until Mr. and Mrs. Wag were left alone with their honored guest.

The hearts of both were full, and they began to endeavor to express their feelings; but the singular old gentleman stopped them by saying:

"Needn't tell me. Know it all. Shall run away if you go on so. Remember, I told you I had more of the 'ready' than I knew what to do with. Couldn't have done better with it, eh? Out at interest now. Best sort of interest, too. More pleasure than receiving dividends, eh! Never was happier. So come, let us wind up for the night. I've a memorandum or two for you

in my pocket-book," and he placed it on the table, and began to turn over divers papers, as he continued, "Hem! ha! Yes. Those two. You'd better take them, my good sir. They'll admit William and Stephen to Christ Church—what they call the Blue-Coat School. Capital school, eh?"

"My dear sir!" exclaimed Jeremiah.

"Don't interrupt me, that's a good fellow," said the old gentleman. "Hem! Do you ever smoke a pipe?"

"Very rarely," replied the wondering Mr. Wag.

"Well," continued his guest, "take that paper to light your next with. Put it in your pocket, and don't look at it till I'm gone. Hem! Tom's master says he will make a good scholar; so, if you've no objection, I was thinking he might as well go to college in a year or two. Not in your way, perhaps? Never mind. I know some of the big-wigs. See all right, and enter his name. Should have one parson in a large family, eh?"

Here Mrs. Wag could no longer refrain from giving vent to her overcharged feelings by certain incoherent ejaculations, which terminated in a flood of tears.

"Humph!" said the old gentleman, "my spectacles want wiping." And he took the opportunity of rubbing them and blowing his nose, while Jeremiah was comforting the wife of his bosom, and telling her not to be so foolish, although he could scarcely avoid snivelling himself.

"Hem! ahem!" resumed their guest; "I think I've got some of the mince pie sticking in my throat. Stupid old fellow to eat so much, eh?"

"Better take another glass of wine, sir," said Jeremiah. "Give me leave, sir, to pour it out?"

"No, no!" exclaimed Mrs. Wag, starting up and smiling through her tears, "let me! Nobody else! God bless you, sir!"

"And you, too!" ejaculated the old gentleman, gayly; "come, that's a challenge! Glasses round! and then we must say good-night. Don't let us make a dull end of a merry evening."

Warm benedictions were forthwith uttered, and the "compliments of the season" were wished, with more than common sincerity, by all three, as their glasses met jingling together. Then, the whimsical guest tossed off his wine, jumped up, shook his hosts heartily by the hand, wished them good-night, and sal-

lied into the shop to find his cloak. Mr. and Mrs. Wag followed, and expressed a hope that he would honor their Christmas dinner by his presence on the following day; but all they could draw from him was:

"Can't promise. Ate and drank a little too much to-night, perhaps. Getting shockingly old. See how I am in the morning. Enjoyed myself this evening. A jolly set of Wags altogether. Merry Wags all, eh?—young and old. Well, well, wag along happily, my dear Mr. and Mrs. Wag! Good-night!" And after once more shaking hands with them, he nimbly whisked himself out at the shop-door, and trotted across to the King's Arms.

No sooner were the worthy couple alone than curiosity led them to examine the piece of paper which their benefactor had presented to Jeremiah for the purpose of lighting his pipe, and it proved to be the promissory note which the latter had signed for the first thousand pounds. The donor's intention was plain enough, as it was regularly cancelled, so Mrs. Wag was obliged to use her pocket handkerchief once more; and her spouse, after striding three or four times across the room, felt himself also under the necessity of taking out his and blowing his nose with unusual vehemence. Then they congratulated and comforted each other, and said their prayers, and offered up their thanksgivings with a fervor and sincerity that proved they were not unworthy of their good fortune. Then they retired to rest, though not immediately to sleep, for they were each beset by strange waking dreams, and beheld in their minds' eye a black clerical Wag, two long-coated little blue Wags, with yellow nether investments, and other Wags of sorted sizes, but all very happy.

On the following morning, being Christmas day, our fortunate shopkeeper equipped himself in his best apparel, and, before breakfast, stepped across the road, and found Mr. Titus Twist rubbing his eyes in his own gateway. Mutual salutations and "compliments of the season" were exchanged in good neighborly style, and then mine host exclaimed:

"There's a box here for you, Master Wag, left by that queer little old gentleman. I'm sure he's cracked! In he comes here yesterday, just after dark, posting in his own carriage. Well, he orders up anything as we happened to have ready, and I sets him down to as good a dinner as ever any gentleman

need sit down to, though I say it, because why, you see, our larder's pretty considerably well stocked at this season. So down he sits, rubbing his hands, and seeming as pleased as Punch, and orders a bottle of wine; but, before he'd been ten minutes at table, up he jumps, claps on his cloak and hat, and runs smack out o' the house, and never comes back again till past eleven at night, when he pays his bill, and orders horses for six o'clock this morning."

"Is he gone, then?" exclaimed Jeremiah.

"Off, sure enough," replied Titus; "but he's left a great box for you, which I was just going to send over. So, I suppose, you and he have some dealings together."

"Yes," said Mr. Wag, "I shall have cause to bless and thank him the latest day I have to live; but I wish he had stopped here to-day. Well, God bless him, wherever he has gone. Hark ye, neighbor—you have often heard me speak of having a friend—well, that's him. I don't know why, but he's taken a fancy to me, and my wife and family, and has done for us more than you'd believe, if I was to tell you. However, we can chat that over another day, as I can't stop now, as Mrs. Wag and the children are waiting breakfast. But where's the box? I'll take it with me, if you please."

"If two of the strongest fellows in my yard can take it over, it's as much as they can," replied Titus. "However, they shall try; and I hope you'll come over this afternoon and crack a bottle of my best to drink the little queer old gentleman's health. But, mind me, he's cracked to a certainty, and you'll find it out some of these days."

The box was accordingly delivered, and on being opened was found to contain a dozen separate packages, each directed for one member of the Wag family, the largest for Jeremiah the father, and the smallest for little Philip, a "rising three" year old Wag. Their contents were far too various for precise specification, but could not have been more judiciously appropriated nor more gratefully received, so that Christmas day was a day of rejoicing; and the only regret felt by one and all the Wags was that their very kind friend had not stayed to spend it with them.

When the festive season was over matters went on as usual with Jeremiah, save that perhaps there was more of cheerfulness in his manner while pursuing his course of steady industry. The fact was that he never

now felt perplexed about money affairs, which were wont formerly to occupy much of his time by day, and cause him many sleepless hours by night. Those who had called for payment were as welcome as those who came to pay, and consequently his credit stood high; and the travellers and London houses strove, by tempting bargains and peculiar attention in "selecting the best articles to complete his kind orders," to keep his name upon their books. So he went on and prospered in all his undertakings, and in the course thereof visited the metropolis to make purchases, and, when there, called upon Mr. Goodfellow, who gave him a hearty welcome, but could not be persuaded to reveal the name of his eccentric client, though he scrupled not to say that he was in good health, adding, with a smile, "and in perfect possession of his intellects."

Jeremiah next endeavored to worm the secret from his bankers, but with no better success. The partner who received him assured him that the steady increase and respectability of his account had wrought such an impression in a quarter which he was not permitted to name, that their house would feel much pleasure in making advances whenever anything advantageous offered itself for purchase.

"It is wonderful!" exclaimed Jeremiah.

"A good character, my dear sir," observed the banker, "is everything in trade. We are dealers in money; and nothing pleases us more than placing it where we know it is safe, and have every reason to suppose it may be useful."

"But," observed Jeremiah, "you know nothing about me."

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Wag," said the banker; "you are what we call a good man, and have got a back."

"A back!" exclaimed the bewildered shopkeeper.

"Yes," said the banker, smiling, "that is, a good friend to your back; and though he chooses to keep himself in the background, depend upon it he'll not forsake you so long as you go on as you have done. Therefore, buy away for ready cash as largely as you please, and we'll honor your drafts."

On this hint Jeremiah subsequently acted, by making purchases which enabled him to serve his customers "on terms that defied all competition." Therefore, and by dint of strict attention and civility, his trade continued to increase till he was obliged to add

warehouses to his shop, and employ a regular clerk and collector, besides shopmen, porters and wagoners.

In the meanwhile young Tom Wag studied Latin and Greek with a neighboring curate; William and Stephen were, in due course, admitted into the Blue-Coat School, and the education of the other children went on precisely as had been recommended by their eccentric benefactor, whose advice Mr. and Mrs. Wag considered equivalent to commands. Still they were often uneasy about him, and more particularly after another Christmas eve had passed without his appearance. Poor Mrs. Wag was sure he was ill, and would occasionally charge him with unkindness for not letting her know, that she might go and nurse him. But again months and months rolled away, and at last autumn arrived, and with it brought the grand denouement of the mystery, as suddenly as their former good luck.

All the Wags who were at home were sitting round a tea-table in the little garden at the back of the house, and Mrs. Wag was sedately filling their cups, when one of the younger children exclaimed, "Who's that?"

Jeremiah looked round to where the child was gazing and beheld his benefactor stealthily approaching from the back door, with an arch smile on his countenance, as though wishing to take them by surprise; but perceiving that he was discovered, he stepped nimbly forward, according to his usual custom, and holding out his hand, said:

"Well, my dear Wag, how are you? How are you, my dear Mrs. Wag?—and how are you, young Jerry Wag, Mary Wag, Sarah Wag, Henry Wag and Philip Wag?"

All expressed their delight at his appearance, according to their different ages and abilities, but all were evidently delighted, and none more than the strange little gentleman himself, whose eyes sparkled with gratification as he took his seat, looked round at the joyous group, and begged to join their family party. Mrs. Wag felt somewhat tremulous at first, and doubtless her visitor perceived it, as he turned his attention to the little Wags till she had finished her table arrangements and handed him a cup of tea.

"Thank you, my good lady," said he, "that's as it should be. All merry Wags together, eh?"

"We—we—thank God!" whimpers Mrs. Wag; "we are. Yes! But it's all your doing, sir. I wish I could thank you as I ought."

Here Jeremiah, perceiving that his spouse was too nervous to make an excellent speech, "took up the cudgels" of gratitude; but, saving that there could be no doubt of his sincerity, displayed no great oratorical talents. Brief, however, as his speeches, or rather ejaculations, were, the funny old gentleman stopped him by the apparently funny observation:

"So, my good Jeremiah Wag, you don't know where your father came from?"

"No sir, indeed," replied the shopkeeper, marvelling at the oddity of the question.

"Well, then, I do," said his benefactor; "I was determined to find it out, because the name is so uncommon. Hard work I had, though. Merchant, to whom he was clerk, dead. Son in the West Indies. Wrote. No answer for some time—then not satisfactory. Obliged to wait till he came back. Long talk. No use. Well, well. Tell you all about it another day. Cut it short now. Found out a person who was intimate friend and fellow-clerk with your father. Made all right. Went down into the north. Got his register."

"Really, sir," stammered Jeremiah; "it was very kind of you, but I'm sorry you should have given yourself so much trouble; but I'm sure, if I have any poor relations that I can be of service to in employing them, now that your bounty has put me in the way of doing well, I shall be very glad, though I never did hear talk of any."

"No, Master Jeremiah," said the eccentric old gentleman, "you have no poor relations now, nor ever had; but your father had a good-for-nothing elder brother, who left home at an early age, after your grandmother's death, and was enticed to go abroad by fair promises which were not fulfilled. So, not having anything agreeable to write about, he didn't write at all, like a young scamp as he was, and when the time came that he had something pleasant to communicate, it was too late, as his father was no more, and his only brother (your father) was gone nobody knew where. Well, to make a short story of it, that chap, your uncle, was knocked about in the world, sometimes up and sometimes down, but at last found himself pretty strong upon his legs, and then made up his mind to come back to Old England, where he found nobody to care for him, and went wandering hither and thither, spending his time at watering-places, and so on, for several years."

"And pray, sir," inquired Jeremiah, as his

respected guest paused, "have you any idea what became of him?"

"Yes I have," replied the little gentleman, smiling significantly at his host and hostess. "One day he arrived in a smallish town, very like this, and terribly low-spirited he was, for he'd been ill some time before, and was fretting himself to think that he had been tolling to scrape money together, and was without children or kindred to leave it to. No pleasant reflection that! Well, he ordered dinner, for form's sake, at the inn, and then went yawning about the room; and then he took his stand at the window, and, looking across the road, he saw the name of Wag over a shop-door, and then—You know all the rest! The fact is, I am a Wag, and, Jeremiah Wag, you are my nephew, and you, my dear Mrs. Wag, are my niece, and so let us be merry Wags together."

Here we might lay down the pen, were it not for our dislike to strut in borrowed plumes; and that inclineth us to inform the gentle reader that no part of this simple story is of our invention, except the last disclosure of the senior Wag's relationship to his namesake, which we ventured to add, fearing that the *truth* might appear *incredible*. The other facts occurred precisely as we have stated. An elderly gentleman, bearing a name more singular than Wag, returned home from India with a handsome fortune, somewhat more than a half century back, and sought in vain for relatives; but one day, from the window of an inn, at which he had arrived in his own dark-green travelling-chariot, he espied the shop of a namesake, whose acquaintance he instantly made. His expressed hope was to discover that they were connected by some distant tie of consanguinity; but failing in that object, after most minute investigation, he never withdrew his patronage. For many years he watched over the rising fortunes of the family, and as the young people arrived at maturity, provided for them as though they were his own children, to the extent of many thousand pounds; and when he died he left among them the whole of his property. Now, though the heart and conduct of this good man were truly benevolent, there can be no question respecting the motive of his actions, for he often avowed it. He was determined to keep up the respectability of his name; and the few who now bear it move in a much higher circle than would have been their lot but for him whom they consider as the founder of their family.